

Syracuse University, Local Community Invited to Celebrate Sustainability and Earth Day at EARTHFEST

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Syracuse University’s Sustainability Division, the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) and Students of Sustainability (SOS) will sponsor EARTHFEST, a free communitywide, sustainability-themed music and arts festival celebrating Earth Day in the Thornden Park Amphitheater on Sunday, April 24, from noon-6 p.m., with a pre-event yoga session starting at 11:30 a.m.

Last year’s event was highly successful, with more than 700 attendees throughout the day. This year, the event plans to have an even greater turnout. The day will feature live bands, art installations, local food and craft vendors, community and student organizations, and prominent speakers. All proceeds will benefit *Syracuse Grows*, a not-for-profit grassroots network that develops food justice through advocacy, education and resources in support of urban food production.

“EARTHFEST is an opportunity for SU

Sustainability to thank everybody for helping us with all of our sustainable initiatives on campus,” says Melissa Cadwell, sustainability coordinator for the Sustainability Division.

The event originated in the 1990s with a NYPIRG tradition of hosting a community Earth Day celebration, but for a period of time, for one reason or another, the event stopped, says Paul Otteson, the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) Green Campus Initiative advisor.

Looking for a place for his band, *Earth Jam*, to play, Otteson organized to restart the event, reaching out to community and campus organizations. Otteson says the basic model of the event, which involves speakers, bands, tablers and activities on a Sunday afternoon, has been consistent throughout its history, and he prides the involvement of multiple organizations as well as “human diversity, musical diversity and speaker diversity” for the event’s success. “Community members that attend can be in touch with students, and students can be in touch with the history and aspects of the community,” he says.

Otteson acknowledges the kind of environmental destruction, involving unregulated air pollution, smoke, sludge, spills, and burning rivers that led to an emerging consciousness in the American environmental movement. “Young people today can’t get a sense of what that was like,” he says.

Otteson was an eighth grader when he attended the first Earth Day in 1970 in Philadelphia, a culmination of concerned individuals and political alignment. Forty-six years later, Earth Day is still annually celebrated on April 22. EARTHFEST will be a benchmark day that works to unite the community in acknowledging past and present sustainable efforts while looking ahead towards future initiatives.

“This event is about the shared connection between this area of Syracuse, combining SU, ESF and all the hard work the community does to keep us environmentally sound,” says Cadwell. She mentioned some particular efforts: regular litter cleanups through *Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency*, the rain barrels throughout Syracuse from the “*Save the Rain*” program, and the annual bulb giveaway at *Westcott Community Center*. “It’s about this whole community coming together to celebrate what we’ve all done—not individually but as a community,” says Cadwell.

Orange Music Group, a student organization that works on producing, marketing and branding for local artists, has coordinated the event’s band outreach. The featured music includes rock, pop, funk and soul. The headliner band playing at 4 p.m. is *Pizza Party*, which consists of four Syracuse University music business majors and a lively and dynamic music experience combining classic rock, pop, jam rock and hip hop music.

There will be raffle tickets sold for \$1 each for several raffles that will be called at the end of the day. Attendees are asked to make donations online through a *GoFundMe donation page* or in-person the day of the event. In addition, all vendors have been asked to donate a percentage of funds raised to the organization.

Some student organizations tabling will be *Democracy Matters SU*, which advocates for campaign financing and other pro-democracy reforms, and *BrainFeeders*, a group that works to establish long-lasting food access and justice programs throughout the Syracuse University and ESF campus. The day’s keynote speaker will be Blair Horner, the executive director of NYPIRG, starting at noon. Horner was instrumental in the fight to keep fracking out of New York State.

This Earth Day celebration has expanded over the years and seems to only be gaining momentum and interest in Syracuse. “The event feels like it’s going to have some longevity and life to it,” says Otteson.

Since EARTHFEST promotes sustainability, attendees are encouraged and asked to bring any items they need, such as reusable water bottles, cups, silverware and Tupperware. Vendors have been asked to use sustainable products, including paper or recyclable plastic products. In addition, composting, trash and recycling will be readily available to avoid any litter.

The event is open to the public. The location and directions can be found [here](#). R.S.V.P. and receive updates on the [Facebook event](#). Like and share the EARTHFEST [Facebook community page](#). Check out the Facebook pages of the sponsors: [Syracuse University Sustainability](#), [NYPIRG SU and ESF](#), and [Students of Sustainability](#).
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